

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Food for Mood, Thought, and for Staying Healthy, Part 4: Boosting Brain Health and Immunity

Nutrition is a core protective factor to promoting brain health and fighting brain illness. Throughout our **BRAIN HEALTH BOOST** series, the Brain Health Initiative will provide information to support your brain health through nutrition. Today is nutrition part four and the focus is on the role of food in boosting immunity and fighting brain illness.

We all want to feel as good as we can during these times of uncertainty. So, you might be surprised to learn that certain nutrients in foods have been shown to enhance brain health and fight brain illness by spurring the release of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine. We are feeling a lot of stress right now, and the unfortunate reality is that stress worsens feelings of low mood or angst, and it also suppresses our immune systems.

The Brain Health Initiative's nutritional scientific and clinical expert, Uma Naidoo, MD, director of MGH Nutritional and Lifestyle Psychiatry, recommends targeting immune-boosting foods that will have the dual effect of helping us feel less anxious and boosts our immunity. She suggests incorporating these foods into our diet as a way to include healthier options during this unusual time of stress and uncertainty.

We all have to eat, so attending to our nutrition is something we can all control, and then reap the benefits of an increase in brain health with an improved mood.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Dr. Naidoo says you can reduce anxiety and boost immunity by choosing:

- Citrus fruit and red bell peppers (both rich in vitamin C, which in some studies has been shown to support your immune system).
- Spices: ginger, garlic, turmeric, and capsaicin (from chili peppers) can be easily added to soup, stew, stir-fry, or salad dressing.
- Foods rich in zinc such as oysters, clams, mussels, cashews, liver, beef, and egg yolks. You may recognize zinc as an ingredient in the cold remedy Zicam®, as zinc has some virus-fighting effects.
- Magnesium-rich foods may help you to feel calmer and help support immunity. Stress can deplete our magnesium levels, too. Examples are legumes, nuts, seeds, leafy greens, and whole grains.
- Fatty fish like wild Alaskan salmon contains omega-3 fatty acids. A 2011 study on medical students was one of the first to show that omega-3s may help reduce anxiety.
- Eat probiotic-rich foods such as pickles, sauerkraut, miso, and kefir.
- Add some antioxidants to your anti-anxiety diet, which can support your immune system.

The bottom line: Staying at home during the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging for everyone, and the increased anxiety (and boredom) can cause us to abandon our healthy eating intentions and snack on whatever is around. But with a little thought and planning, we can continue to make good food choices and maybe even boost our mood and immunity.

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to promoting brain health and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. Through education, research, innovation and action the collaboration between Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance intends to build brain healthy communities with cultures that increase brain health protective factors and reduce risk factors, improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Gulf Coast region and beyond. Join the movement, lifestyle makes a difference.

To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).